

BEST PRACTICE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS*

RECOMMENDATIONS ON TEACHING READING

INCREASE

- Reading aloud to students
- Time for independent reading
- Student's choice of their own reading materials
- Exposing students to a wide and rich range of literature
- Teacher modeling and discussing his/her own reading processes
- Primary instructional emphasis on comprehension
- Teaching reading as a process:
 - Use strategies that activate prior knowledge
 - Help students make and test predictions
 - Structure help during reading
 - Provide after-reading applications
- Social, collaborative activities with much discussion and interaction
- Grouping by interests or book choices
- Silent reading followed by discussion
- Teaching skills in the context of whole and meaningful literature
- Writing before and after reading
- Encouraging invented spelling in student's early writings
- Use of reading in the content fields (e.g. historical novels in social studies)
- Evaluation that focuses on holistic, higher-order thinking processes
- Measuring success of reading program by students' reading habits, attitudes, and comprehension

DECREASE

- Exclusive emphasis on whole-class or reading-group activities
- Teacher selection of all reading materials for individuals and groups
- Relying on selection in basal reader
- Teacher keeping his/her own reading tastes and habits private
- Primary instructional emphasis on reading subskills such as phonics, word analysis, syllabication
- Teaching reading as a single, one-step act
- Solitary seatwork
- Grouping by reading level
- Round-robin oral reading
- Teaching isolated skills in phonics workbooks or drills
- Little or no chance to write
- Punishing preconventional spelling in students' early writings
- Segregation of reading to reading time
- Evaluation focus on individual, low-level subskills
- Measuring the success of the reading program only by test scores

* Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels, Arthur Hyde *Best Practice* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998).

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RECOMMENDATIONS ON TEACHING WRITING

INCREASE

- Student ownership and responsibility by:
 - Helping students choose their own topics and goals for improvement
 - Using brief teacher-student conferences
 - Teaching students to review their own progress
- Class time spent on writing whole, original pieces through:
 - Establishing real purposes for writing and students' involvement in the task
 - Instruction in and support for all stages of writing process
 - Prewriting, drafting, revising, editing
- Teacher modeling writing – drafting, revising, sharing – as a fellow author and as demonstration of processes
- Learning of grammar and mechanics in context, at the editing stage, and as items are needed
- Writing for real audiences, publishing for the class and for wider communities
- Making the classroom a supportive setting for shared learning, using:
 - Active exchange and valuing of students' ideas
 - Collaborative small-group work
 - Conferences and peer critiquing that give responsibility for improvement to students
- Writing across the curriculum as a tool for learning
- Constructive and efficient evaluation that involves:
 - Brief informal responses as students work
 - Thorough grading of just a few of student-selected, polished pieces
 - Focus on a few errors at a time
 - Cumulative view of growth and self-evaluation
 - Encouragement of risk taking and honest expression

DECREASE

- Teacher control of decision-making by:
 - Teacher deciding on all writing topics
 - Suggestions for improvement dictated by teacher
 - Learning objectives determined by teacher alone
 - Instruction given as whole-class activity
- Time spent on isolated drills on “subskills” of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, paragraphing, penmanship, etc.
- Writing assignments given briefly, with no context or purpose, completed in one step
- Teacher talks about writing but never writes or shares own work
- Isolated grammar lessons, given in order determined by textbook, before writing is begun
- Assignment read only by teacher
- Devaluation of students' ideas through:
 - Students viewed as lacking knowledge and language abilities
 - Sense of class as competing individuals
 - Work with fellow students viewed as cheating, disruptive
- Writing taught only during “language arts” period – i.e. infrequently
- Evaluation as negative burden for teacher and student by:
 - Marking all papers heavily for all errors, making teacher a bottleneck
 - Teacher editing paper, and only after completed, rather than student making improvements
 - Grading seen as punitive, focused on errors, not growth

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